THE PROMISE OF THE CHRIST'S RETURN

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A SACRED PLAY

by the late

WELLER VAN HOOK, M.D.

Professor of Surgery in the North Western University, Evanston, Illinois, U.S.A.—General Secretary of the Theosophical Society in America, 1907-1912

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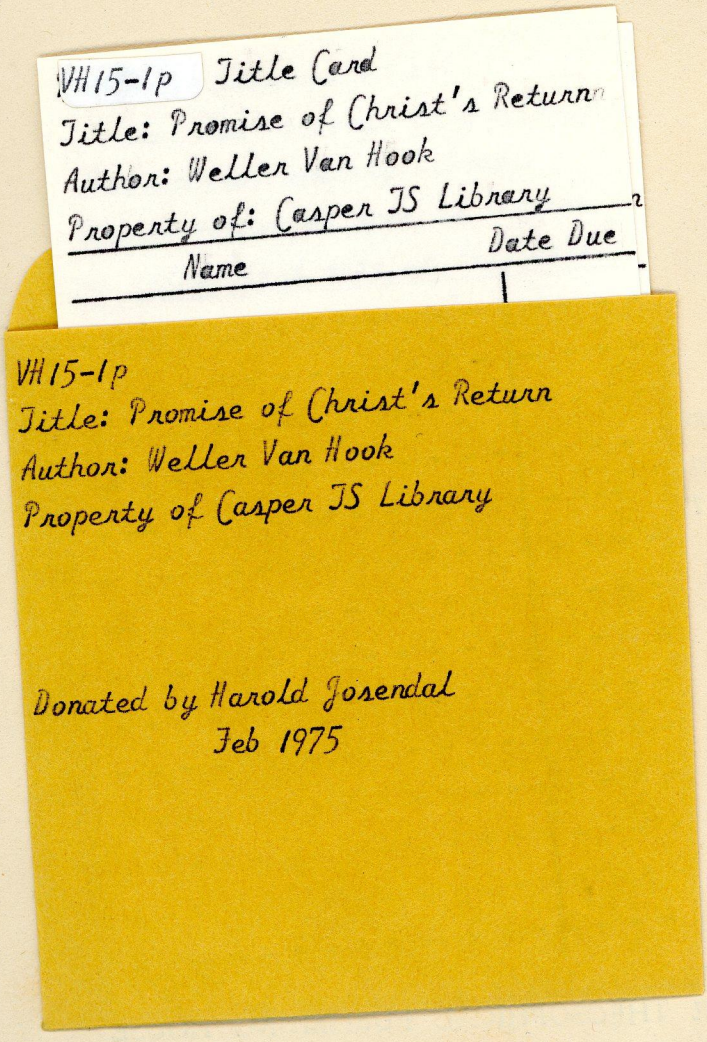

This sacred play was first published by its author, Dr. Weller Van Hook, in *The Theosophic Messenger*, the journal of the American Section of the Theosophical Society, in December 1909. It was presented to a Theosophical audience in Chicago on December 23, 1910 at the Assembly Hall, the characters being represented by D. S. M. Unger (Abraham), Ralph Packard (Seti), William Brinsmaid (Julius). C. Jinarājadāsa was the stage manager and carefully coached the three actors.

It was presented in Seattle, Washington State, in April 1911, the characters being represented by Max Wardall (Abraham), C. Jinarājadāsa (Seti), Ray M. Wardall (Julius).

In Sydney, Australia, the play was presented on Easter Tuesday, April 6, 1920, the rôles being taken by George H. Chappel (Abraham), C. Jinarājadāsa (Seti), L. W. Burt (Julius).

It was presented in Adyar on April 1, 1923, the characters being C. S. Trilokekar (Abraham), N. S. Rama Rao (Seti), Brian Anrias Ross (Julius).

The short drama being a sacred play, there was no applause, and in order to produce the atmosphere needed, the following music was played in U.S.A. and Sydney:

1. Before the first act, and before the curtain was drawn: *Beethoven*, Sonata, Opus 7, No. 2 *Adagio.*

2. Before the second act and before the curtain was drawn: *Beethoven*, Sonata Pathètique, *Adagio.*

3. Before the third act, and before the curtain was drawn: *Chopin*, Nocturne, G. Minor.

4. At the conclusion of the play, immediately as the curtain fell: *Beethoven*, Eroica Symphony, *Marche Funèbre*, ("Funeral March of a Hero").

In the representation on December 25, 1948, during the 73rd Annual Convention of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, the parts were taken by C. D. T. Shores (Abraham), C. Jinarājadāsa (Seti), Sidney A. Cook (Julius).

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THE PROMISE OF THE CHRIST'S RETURN

A Sacred Play in Three Acts

By Weller Van Hook, M.D.

Time: The later life-time of Jesus.

Place: The environs of Jerusalem.

Dramatis personae: Three young men: Abraham, a Jewish scholar; Seti, a wandering Egyptian student; Julius, a Roman warrior.

Abraham and Seti have already met and become friends. They have listened to several discourses of the Christ. The Roman has just attended for the first time the Sermon on the Mount. All three have left the crowd, Abraham and Seti in animated conversation, the Roman in a thoughtful mood. As he was noted by Abraham and Seti as one of the listeners, they accost him.

ACT I

ABRAHAM:

What think you, Roman, of this man,
Jesus, and His Sermon on the Mount?
For me—I am in much doubt.
Attracted by His theories, I fain would learn;
Yet my old religion bids me think well
Before I espouse new ways of thought and deed.

JULIUS:

Scarce do Romans discuss such themes
At once with those fresh-met, as now,
With thee, friend Jew. Yet eager am I,
Too, all to review that this rare man
Has taught this morn. Days long agone
Might I have heard Him speak, had not
Our galley, headed true from Brundusium to Tyre,

Been scuttled twice by a slave, whose black heart,
Forgiven at first, was pierced by Gaius' spear.
Now Gaius, boatman shrewd, repairs the ship
Well-hauled upon the sand, resting amid round rocks.
I love ships well and, were I not by Fate
Fair forced to fight by land in Caesar's ranks,
Sure would I transfer my love to Neptune's devotees.
Has He long taught this quaint doctrine
That we shall *love*, not hate our enemies ?

SETI :

Ah ! that is just my case ! What means He—
I cannot comprehend—we shall give all away
And follow Him ? Whence comes He, Abraham ?
By what authority invested does He dare
Usurp the functions of the Gods ? Does He, perchance,
Bring some new and untried deity for us
To worship, teaching a new philosophy ?

ABRAHAM :

A doctrine He gives forth, it seems to me,
Of pure unselfishness, or better still, of selflessness.
Many sayings, parables, tells He of generous ways
Which men may find easily to relieve
The fierce buffetings of Fate, each for
His neighbour. Such virtues as are known,
And sometimes practised amid men, He preaches.
Yet, when the wonder-seeking multitude
Is fed and, sated, leaves the grassy amphitheatre,
He, drawing off a certain few, expounds
His doctrines full, explains His parables,
And in few, quiet words tells of man's origin,
His destiny, and how it is our mission high,
If we will follow Him, to aid in hastening
Man's evolving to that perfect day when,
Our journeying o'er, we may rest, all united in

Heart and mind, knowing ourselves, knowing our
Loved ones and, best of all, knowing God Himself.
So, being at one with these, to be forever
Free from all Fate's forces, free to learn more of God,
And to grow into His likeness ever more.

JULIUS:

But I'm told He doth practise magic, commanding
Demons, ordering men free of them and healing
Disease by secret processes! Though but yesterday
Our galley's keel ground upon your rocky shore,
I've heard the tale of His feeding thousands,
Using but a few small fish and tiny loaves,
Multiplying these to meet their humble need!
How sparkle the eyes of those who tell these things!
Thine, Rabbi, are glittering now! Methinks I see a convert!

SETI:

Ah, Roman, could you but have seen the blind
Restored to sight, or felt the fluttering joy
Of that crushed soul, in woman's form,
Mary Magdalene, outcast of women, forgiven,
Restored to hope of such purity within as doth
Transcend a million-fold mere outward cleanness!
Could you have heard His story of our race's future peace
and glory!

ABRAHAM:

Perhaps, again, Roman, you will meet with us.
Again we hope to hear Him, and resolve some doubts
We've raised that His philosophy may not avail to cure.

JULIUS:

Gladly will we meet again.

(EXIT)

ACT II

JULIUS:

Hail! Friend Jew; Hail! Good Egyptian!

SETI:

Good Day!

ABRAHAM:

Good Day!

SETI:

Have you not heard what happened yesterday?
Have you not yet visited the temple,
The Hebrew gossip-shop? No? Strange things
Have been done by Jesus, most unaccustomed!
Standing by His side, listening
To His sweet expounding of philosophy,
Suddenly I heard a woman call, as breathless she ran
Toward us, "Jesus, he whom thou didst
So love, that gentle one, my brother Lazarus,
Is dead! He whom Thou didst love divinely,
Lies now within a sepulchre, a great stone
Rests against the door! O come with me
That Thy gracious words and Thy tender presence,
So vibrant of sympathy and wise strength to aid,
May comfort and support them all!"
Then, Julius, Abraham, came that miracle
Strangest of all that yet has been. He, Whom
All of us have learned to love so well since last
Some weeks ago we met here by this stone, He, Who
Had met and vanquished high priests in argument,
Who has turned the usurers from the temple-floor,
That wise, strong man on Whom all leaned—Jesus wept!

JULIUS:

What said He?

ABRAHAM:

I have not heard this latest wonder-tale.

SETI:

" Mary ", He said, " He is not dead, but sleepeth."
" Master ", she replied, " three days the body lies entombed
And now is already decomposed." All were amazed
When Jesus bade us follow Him, and we went
Down into Bethany where the body lay. Strangely
Was the Great One troubled within and deeply groaned
When we approached the grave. Slowly
The heavy stone was rolled away. Loud cried He:
" Lazarus, come forth ! " Then came he forth bandaged closely.
Though his face was tightly swathed, heavily he spoke
In muffled tones and bade us be of good cheer.

JULIUS:

And do you yourself believe that he was dead ?

SETI:

Yes, Mary had spoken true words. The body
Had been decomposed. But all went well with him
When he came forth, and when the cloths were drawn away.
How think you these things are done, my friends ?

ABRAHAM:

Deeply they do puzzle me. I cannot comprehend
This mystery—how these miracles are done.
God's Law defied, though He Himself should abrogate
That Law, the stability of the whole universe would be denied !

SETI:

For me 'tis fortunate I am Egypt's son. As a boy
I served within an ancient temple, where I learned
Some inner lore, was told that there are laws
That far transcend those minor ones we know ;

And those initiate into their full use
May do many things that seem to be beyond
Man's sphere of action, thought, responsibility.
This knowledge of the occult is held
Secret and inviolate by the deans
Of our humanity, whose predecessors gained it in turn,
They say, from Those Who brought it from Venus,
Where Beings older far than are we in evolving
Have dwelt for immemorial years. This wisdom
Sacred, sprung from the Creator, instructs in those steps
Which we have taken in past lives spent in other bodies,
And those which we must take if we would become like Him.
His miracles, then, novel and wonderful howe'er they be to us,
Are yet within the limit of the law He serves.

JULIUS:

Wondrous such knowledge in the aid of men!
More would I learn of it, how to follow on, ever to know more!
Inklings of such I have heard in Rome. The mystery priests
Prate much of weird, gruesome childish spiritings!
Yet, 'neath their ignorant study of birds' viscera
And small prognostications, must lie some sure philosophy.
Perhaps did one but know the teachings of the older priests,
Could one but learn their secrets, he would find such basis
For their daily round as you have just described.

ABRAHAM:

Now that you speak of these things, Seti, do I recall
The scarce whispered references of our Jewish priests
To a secret doctrine of the soul, and its long pilgrimage
In many bodies returning oft to life on earth.
They seem also to know of a magic taught vaguely
In ancient scriptures, Talmud, Kabbala.
Half secretly they speak of a major knowledge, by which
Well-instructed initiates may perform such deeds as these
That Jesus does. Yet in deep awe do they refer sometimes

To India's wise men. They do know, 'tis said,
So much of these deeper laws of Nature, They may
Transcend death's limits, leave the body as They will and,
After wandering o'er the earth, return and enter it again.
Besides They can, if need be, leave the old body
They have outworn, and take some new one,
As that of some young man fresh-drowned
By Fate's premature decree. Thus may Their work proceed
Unhindered by the lack of bodies.

SETI:

Purity of motive, complete self-sacrifice, a willingness
To yield all interests of the man in every form
To the teachings of his Master—these are required
By Jesus of his inner pupils. And in His religion,
You may see how He would train men step by step
To prepare themselves for always more
And greater service for men and God.

JULIUS:

Then you think there lies no truth in the priests' charges
That He consorts with evil powers—is dominate
By some subtle plan to found an empire vast, or
'Stablish a counterpoise 'gainst Rome's aggression ?

SETI:

As I see, that kingdom He would found
Is not of this world—a realm of spirit in which would lie
The world's redemption from those Fates which it has dared.
Piled mountains high is the pent-up force threatening humanity,
That returning force which man has for ages sent forth.
Were this discharged at once, man would be swept away.
His Coming makes possible a gradual discharge,
And now are thronging to Him thousands who will aid
In broadening life's limits for us all, and a few
Who would join Him in His complete self-abnegation.

ABRAHAM:

I fear for Him these the plottings of the priests;
I fear their rage. The agents of Rome are plotting too.

SETI:

We can but wait to see what shall be the outcome
Of all these forces cast together. Fear has He not.

(EXIT)

ACT III

AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION

JULIUS:

Good day, Seti, and to you, Abraham!

SETI:

Good day!

ABRAHAM:

Good day!

JULIUS:

Long is it since we met here in those days
That followed the sermon on the Mount of Olives,
And the restoration of our Lazarus to his friends,
And the ignorant destroying of our Master's body by the mob.
Ah! much have we learned since then of Him and of His work.
Although we have not seen each other, Seti,
And Abraham, how has it fared with you?

ABRAHAM:

These months have been filled with grief and hope,
Now commingled and now separate. We have been so distraught,
'Tis hard to estimate one's state of consciousness.
'Tis better far to look into the future, filled with hope.

SETI:

As Egypt's son, I know the pensive phase of life.
Our nation's force is spent, I fear. Only a drivelling old age
Awaits her, and the pain of backward glancing.
Now for the fulfillment of His promise must we look
To that future life, when we shall be with Him
Again on earth, and aid in the upbuilding here
Of that sacred temple, that fair house not built with hands!

ABRAHAM:

Much is to be done. Our duty 'tis to apprise the world
Of what He taught. Others shall come after us.
Each generation shall have its leaders, teachers,
Each its appointed duty, all preparing the way.

JULIUS:

Seti, did you see the Master when He appeared
To His pupils on the third day after His death?

SETI:

I did, Julius, and since He now oft comes to us
In quiet hours, when we can meet together in some cave,
We'll ask if you may not be there, also.
Quietly we sit and inly, worshipfully invoke
His tender influence, sweet and strong. Presently
He enters our midst, when we're prepared in unity
Of heart and thought, or, through one of us
More sensitive to His gracious influence, speaks
To all, telling the mysteries of the higher worlds,
Explaining the Way by which we best may serve Him,
Furthering the plan of God in Man's evolving to become
More than man, and to grow into the image of the Divine.

ABRAHAM:

Yes, these meetings, and that return of His in future years,
Make up the hope of life for us. From week to week we live,

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Waiting that sweet evening and the secret teachings.
To us no occult powers are given—ours as yet
The earlier Path, preparing well the way for greater things.

JULIUS:

Then, if I may, I'll join you. Strangely the light
Of life has fled from us who knew Him then,
But since His passing have not seen Him.
Blue skies and the green fields are here, yet cold.
They'll breathe of hope, now; they'll tell for me
His Coming, tell the passing of those influences malign
'Neath which we are living. Gladly I'll join His disciples
Who are preparing ground, sowing seed and tending
The fields for Him.

SETI:

Long 'twill be 'ere His return, we're told.
These bodies shall be gone, long ere that time.
Yet shall that return be sure.
In His Name shall all be done.
Blest we if we may be of those on earth in that fair time!
So speed that Day. His Will be done!

FINIS.

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